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Iraq's Agriculture Bounces Back after Years of Neglect

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TIKRIT, Iraq- After decades of strain, the Ministry of Agriculture in the Ninewa Province reported a significant increase in the wheat crop yield for 2006.

Today, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is working with the Government of Iraq to help restore the grain marketing infrastructure by renovating two granaries in the Ninewa Province. With the increase in wheat production, having a place to store the crop is vital.

Once considered the second largest value sector in the country, agriculture in northern Iraq took a dramatic downfall during the years of the Saddam Hussein reign; heavily influenced by Iraq's involvement in military conflicts and by the governments efforts to promote and control agriculture production.

The renovation of these two facilities at a combined cost of approximately \$2 million will provide a reliable source for the processing, storage and distribution of various grain crops, which is needed to restore agriculture productivity.

"The Sinjar and Tal Afar granary renovation projects are beneficial to those farmers in the Ninewa Province and Iraq's agricultural industry," said Maj. Vincent Navarre, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers resident engineer for the Mosul resident office. "These granaries are very rewarding Corps projects. We will have an opportunity to observe the facilities in operation during the next harvest season in Ninewa."

Wheat is a fundamental staple crop in the Middle East. According to USAID reports, Iraqis consume nearly 4 million tons of wheat annually, yet only produce 500,000 tons of milling-quality wheat. More than 85 percent of the wheat consumed is imported, adding to the country's economic burden. These two state-owned grain silos feed into the Public Distribution System's flour requirements; the more grain the government can store, the less they have to import thus easing the economic burden.

U.S. Navy Lt. Shane Stoughton, the Agricultural Team leader for the Ninewa Provincial Reconstruction Team explains, "Increasing the capacity of the granaries as a post-production grain marketing outlet benefits the citizens of northern Iraq and improves the macroeconomic situation of the country as a whole. These projects also raise the demand for grain, which in turn drives the production agriculture sector to achieve greater efficiency and output."

The granaries in the Ninewa Province will help revive the agricultural sector, which will increase domestic production. With agencies such as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, USAID and other non-government organizations working to increase domestic production, the increase will provide income and employment opportunities to the Iraqi people as well as create stability through private sector development, reducing poverty and creating food security.

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